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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001476

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S SOUTHEAST: LOCAL KURDISH BROADCASTING  
REMAINS BLOCKED

REF: A. 04 ADANA 126

[1](#)B. 04 ANKARA 3236

Classified By: Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4 b and d. This is a joint Embassy Ankara/Amconsul Adana cable.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Turkey's High Board of Radio and Television (RTUK) continues to block Kurdish-language broadcasting at the local level, nearly three years after Parliament initially passed EU-related legislation aimed at lifting restrictions. The manager of a Diyarbakir station told us RTUK denied his application without explanation. A RTUK official claimed the agency needs to establish regional monitoring offices and await pending administrative legislation before it can move forward. To date, the GOT's minority-language reforms have resulted only in limited programming on State TV and radio. End Summary.

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Diyarbakir Station Applies for Kurdish Broadcasting  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Diyarbakir-based local station Gun TV first applied in March 2004 for the right to broadcast Kurdish-language news and cultural programming. Last summer during the station's application process, in an apparent evaluation of the station's audience profile, RTUK officials called on the Governor of Diyarbakir to confirm whether Kurdish was spoken by those in Gun TV's viewing audience. The Governor confirmed that it was, which Gun staffers considered to be a good sign at the time. But even that, apparently, was not enough to move Gun TV's application forward.

[1](#)3. (C) Cemal Dogan, Gun TV's broadcasting manager, told Adana poloff in February 2005 that the station had received a negative response from RTUK by means of a December 2004 letter. RTUK stated that Gun TV's application had been denied, but did not provide any rationale behind the decision, according to Dogan. Gun TV replied in writing, requesting more information and specific reasons why RTUK was not able to approve the application. Dogan said Gun TV's letter to RTUK asked whether any part of the application was incomplete, and stated that RTUK should consider Gun TV as having re-applied with the same materials if RTUK could not specify the problems with the application.

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RTUK Has Long Delayed Local Programming  
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[1](#)4. (U) Turkey has been under pressure by the EU to lift restrictions on broadcasting in Kurdish. In 2002, Parliament made the first step in addressing the issue by adopting legislation allowing news and cultural broadcasts in Kurdish and other non-Turkish languages traditionally spoken in Anatolia. However, a subsequent RTUK regulation limited the minority-language broadcasts to the State-owned TRT broadcasting company, which successfully filed a legal challenge on the grounds that RTUK lacked the authority to require it to make such broadcasts.

[1](#)5. (U) Pressed to break the logjam, Parliament in 2003 adopted further legislation explicitly permitting private media outlets to broadcast programming in minority languages. This time, RTUK followed up with a regulation specifying that only national outlets would be permitted to make such broadcasts until RTUK completes a viewer-lister profile to determine which languages are in demand at the local level. No private national channels applied for the broadcasts; a number of broadcasters maintained that it is cost-prohibitive to air minority-language programming at the national level because demand for the languages is regional. Gun TV filed a court challenge against the restriction on local broadcasting. When EU officials complained that, once again, the legal reforms had resulted in no new programming, GOT leaders directed TRT in June 2004 to begin broadcasting immediately in Kurdish and other minority languages (reftel B).

[1](#)6. (C) Meanwhile, there has been no progress toward

permitting minority-language broadcasting at the local level. The TRT broadcasts, though widely hailed at first as a breakthrough, are derided in the Kurdish community as inadequate. The TRT programming comprises several-day-old news broadcasts dubbed in Kurdish and other minority languages, as well as dubbed nature documentaries and some music and dance features. RTUK regulations strictly limit the duration of the broadcasts. One of our TRT contacts conceded that the programming is low quality; the novelty of the broadcasts drew an audience at first, but interest has waned.

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RTUK: Two Obstacles to Local Broadcasts  
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17. (C) Ankara poloff discussed Gun TV's application, and the overall issue of local minority-language broadcasting, with RTUK Co-Chairman Zakir Avsar on March 9. The RTUK official averred that Gun TV's application was not denied but "suspended" for the time being. He said there are essentially two obstacles preventing RTUK from permitting local minority-language broadcasting at this time: 1) RTUK needs to establish regional offices around the country to monitor the local broadcasts, and 2) before moving forward, RTUK must await pending legislation that will require an organizational overhaul of not only RTUK but all of Turkey's high councils and boards (on banking, telecommunications, higher education, etc.) to conform to EU standards. Avsar said RTUK used to maintain regional offices until they were closed under legislation adopted in 2001. The new regional branches will require more resources than the old ones, because RTUK will need to hire employees who speak Kurdish and other minority languages in order to monitor local broadcasters. He said the viewer-listener profile has not been completed, but insisted that would not present a significant obstacle. He also said the Gun TV application failed to meet RTUK regulations in some "technical" aspects; he claimed he could not recall the details, but averred that RTUK will raise them with Gun TV at a later date.

18. (C) Avsar also noted that RTUK has frequently sanctioned Gun TV over the years for illegal broadcasts. He claimed these broadcasts included statements advocating terrorism, to the point of directing viewers to take up arms and attack police (Note: We have no confirmation of this. RTUK typically sanctions stations for controversial speech with no direct link to violence. For example, in September 2004 RTUK ordered Gun TV off the air for 30 days for the station's live coverage of a symposium on local administration, human rights, and the media. End Note). Avsar averred that Gun TV's past behavior does not disqualify the station from receiving permission for Kurdish-language broadcasts. However, he asserted, Gun TV is a classic example of the kind of broadcaster RTUK needs to monitor closely via regional offices.

9 (C) When we related Avsar's explanation to Latif Okul, head of the TRT Broadcast Supervisory Department, he laughed and said RTUK is "making excuses." Okul said RTUK epitomizes the worst characteristics of what he considers an "overbearing, meddling" State bureaucracy. There is no need, he averred, for RTUK to monitor everything that is said over the airwaves; Turkish broadcasters are required to keep recordings of all programs for one year, and RTUK should investigate only when a complaint is filed, as is done in Western countries. Okul said RTUK's real goal is to postpone indefinitely the day when it has to authorize local broadcasts in Kurdish. "When the law on high councils is passed and the regional offices are established, they will find another excuse," he predicted.

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Comment  
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110. (C) Gun TV's saga epitomizes how Turkey's reform process has failed to gain internal momentum despite the GOT's stated commitment to EU membership. Each step in the field of minority-language broadcasting has been taken only at the direct urging of the EU. TRT began its tightly restricted minority-language broadcasts to much fanfare in June 2004 as part of the GOT's effort to persuade the EU to open accession talks. Since the December Summit there has been no progress, nor will there be unless the EU, once again, calls attention to the issue and insists on further action. Allowing local channels to broadcast in Kurdish would give real meaning to the legislative reforms, something RTUK appears determined to avoid.

EDELMAN